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**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE  
FOOD STAMPS**

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TANF or PaS Reference

CFR 273.2

Section: **FS-222-1**

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Filing an Application

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Same  
application for  
Chap. I, Sec. B,

**GENERAL RULE** - All households have the right to file an

FS benefits. The household should be encouraged to file the application the same day it expresses an interest in applying. FS benefits will be calculated from the date the application is received by the Department except in the instance of a joint SSI/FS application by a resident of a public institution.

**HOW TO FILE** - To start the application process, the requesting household must file an application, and complete at least the following:

1. Applicant's name and address;
2. sign and date the application.

**APPLICATION PROCESS INCLUDES**

1. providing applications the same day they are requested.
2. assisting in completion.
3. interviewing a responsible member of the household or an authorized representative. When a household fails to appear for an interview, reschedule within the thirty-day filing period.
4. verifying information. When verification is incomplete, offer assistance.
5. processing necessary documents to authorize receipt of FS coupons.

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NOTE: The household may, at any time, voluntarily withdraw the application. The record shall be documented that the household wanted to withdraw and, if appropriate, the reason for withdrawal.

TANF or PaS RECIPIENTS:

1. TANF or PaS applicants shall be given the opportunity to apply for FS benefits at the same time they apply for TANF or PaS.
2. SSI applicants/recipients shall be allowed to apply for FS at the Social Security Office or in public institutions. The Social Security Office will forward all completed FS applications to the appropriate Food Stamp Office for eligibility determination. The Food Stamp Office shall screen applications for completeness, verification, and expedited service. A second interview is not required.

When a resident of a public institution is jointly applying for SSI and food stamps prior to leaving the institution, the filing date is the date of release from the institution.

DUPLICATE PARTICIPATION:

Same  
Chap. II,  
FS household  
Section A

Individuals cannot be included as members in more than one in the same month - this also applies to individuals moving from one state to another.

**EXCEPTION:** Individuals who reside in shelters for battered women and children (FS 444-6).

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Filing an Application

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To determine eligibility, the application form and applicable supplements must be completed and signed. The household or its authorized representative must be interviewed and certain information on the application and supplements must be verified. If the household refuses to cooperate, the application shall be denied at the time of refusal. For a determination of refusal to be made, the household must be able to cooperate, but clearly demonstrate that it will not take actions it can take and that are required to complete the application process.

The household shall also be determined ineligible if it refuses to cooperate in any subsequent review of its eligibility.

Once denied or terminated for refusal to cooperate, the household shall not be determined eligible until it cooperates.

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TANF or PaS Reference

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Section: **FS-222-2**

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Expedited Service

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Not applicable

**GENERAL RULE** - The following households, including residents of alcohol treatment centers and residents of group living arrangements, are entitled to expedited services:

1. Households with gross monthly income less than \$150.00, and with liquid assets of \$100.00 or less;
2. eligible households whose combined monthly gross income and liquid resources are less than the household's monthly rent/mortgage and utilities.

Such households may use the standard utility allowance in lieu of actual utility costs to qualify for expedited services.

3. migrant farmworkers who meet the definition of "destitute."

"Destitute" means that the household's only income for the month of application was received prior to the date of application and the income was from a source which has been terminated; or the household's only income for the month of application is from a new source if income of more than \$25.00 will not be received by the 10th day after the date of application.

Migrant farmworker households who meet this definition of "destitute" shall have their eligibility and benefit level calculated for the month of application by considering only income which is received between the first of the month and the date of application.

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TANF or PaS: N/A Med: N/ACFR 273.2

Section: **FS-222-2**

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Expedited Service

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TIME LIMITS FOR EXPEDITED SERVICE

Prior to issuance of any coupons, the applicant's identity shall be verified through available documents or a collateral contact.

If all necessary additional verification has been provided, FS coupons shall be authorized the day the application was filed.

**NOTE:** For a household which is otherwise eligible for expedited service but was denied or terminated for refusal to cooperate with a Quality Control reviewer, see FS-222-5.

By State of Maine law, if all necessary additional verification has not been provided by the next work day, verification shall be postponed and coupons authorized before the close of business (the less restrictive federal standard is that coupons be made available to households entitled to expedited service by the 7th calendar day following the date the application was filed -- the Maine standard will now always apply because it requires quicker service than the federal standard).

The verification that we required must be provided before another month's allotment can be authorized.

**NOTE:** Expedited service does not apply to a recertification received before the end of a household's current certification period. However, a recertification received after the household's certification period ends is entitled to expedited service if otherwise eligible for such service.

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TANF or PaS Reference

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Section: **FS-222-3**

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Applicant/Authorized Representative

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1. Applicant - The person in whose name the application is made and in whose name the FS coupons will be mailed.
2. Authorized Representative - A responsible non-household member, designated by the head of the household, or another responsible adult member of the household, to act on behalf of the participating household.

**NOTE:** With the exception of residents of drug and alcohol treatment centers, an authorized representative must be designated in writing by a responsible household member.

An authorized representative must be aware of relevant household circumstances.

**WHO CANNOT BE AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE**

1. State employees involved in the certification and/or issuance process;
2. retailers who are authorized to accept FS coupons;
3. individuals disqualified for an intentional program violation during their disqualification period, unless no one else is available.

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TANF/PaS: I

Med: none

CFR 273.2(e)

Section: **FS-222-4**  
Page 1

**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

Interview Process

**GENERAL RULE** - The person interviewed may be any responsible household member or an authorized representative.

**For Applications** - all households, including those who apply by mail, shall have face-to-face interviews in a regional office or itinerant certification site prior to initial certification.

**For Recertifications** - the interview requirement is as follows:

1. Households with earned income, which must be recertified every three months (including combination TANF/Food Stamp cases with earned income), require a face-to-face interview once a year. The first three recertifications each year will be done by paper review at which
  - the Department of Labor wage match will be examined; and,
  - the household will be contacted if the income fluctuates more than \$25 a week in order to discuss what to anticipate for income in the next certification period.
2. All households must have a face to face interview once a year.
3. If possible, depending upon the length of the certification period, households without earned income will alternate between a paper review and a face-to-face interview.

**Exceptions**

1. A telephone interview shall be used instead of a face-to-face interview for households without earned income in which all household members are age 60 or older, or receive Social Security Disability benefits or SSI, or a combination of Social Security Disability benefits and SSI, unless the household chooses to have a face-to-face interview.

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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Interview Process

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2. The office or itinerant site interview shall be waived upon request by the household if an authorized representative cannot be appointed and no adult member is able to come to the appropriate location because of one of the following:
  - a. They are elderly, or physically, or mentally handicapped
  - b. Transportation difficulties
  - c. Hardships due to residing in a rural area, illness, care of a household member, prolonged severe weather, work or training hours, or any other factor which places undue hardship on the household.

**NOTE:** Applicants and recipients must be made aware of the fact that a face-to-face interview may be waived due to hardship situations as listed above. This is on a case-by-case basis.

When the office or itinerant site interview is waived, the interview shall be conducted by telephone. In the instance where a phone interview cannot be arranged, a home visit will be made.

All interviews shall be scheduled as promptly as possible to insure that eligible households receive benefits within the appropriate time limits for processing. During the interview, the household shall be advised of its rights and responsibilities and the consequences of failure to comply with program requirements.

If the household fails to appear for the first interview, the household shall be notified that it missed the interview appointment and that the household is responsible for rescheduling the missed interview. If the household contacts the Department within the thirty (30) day application period, the Department shall schedule a second interview. If after 30 days from the application date the household has failed to appear for an interview, the application shall be denied.



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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

During the Certification Period

Clients cannot be *required* to come into the office for a face-to-face interview during a certification period; however, a request for the interview can be made. In instances where issues need to be resolved, the client is to be given ten (10) days to respond to the request to resolve the issue. Failure to do so will result in closure procedures for failure to resolve the issue, not for failure to come into the office for an interview.

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TANF or PaS Reference

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Section: **FS-222-5**


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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Different  
Chapter I

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Verification and Documentation

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**GENERAL RULE** - Certain financial and non-financial information must be verified to ensure accuracy.

**EXCEPTION:** Categorically Eligible Households (FS 444-8).

**MANDATORY ITEMS**

Identity (FS 111-3), Alien Status (FS-111-2) Residence (FS 111-3), Social Security Number (FS-111-4), Earned and Unearned Income (FS 555-2 and FS 555-3), Utility Expenses in Excess of Standard (FS-555-5), Terminated Income, Deductible Medical Expenses (FS 555-5), Deductible Legally Obligated Child Support Payments (FS-555-5), and "Disabled" Status (FS-999-1).

**OPTIONAL ITEMS:** Questionable Information That May Affect Eligibility or Benefit Levels (FS 999-1)

**SOURCE OF VERIFICATION:** Documentary evidence shall be used as the primary source of verification for all items except residency and household size. Some examples of documentary evidence are wage stubs, rent receipts, and utility bills. Acceptable verification shall not be limited to any single type of document.

Whenever documentary evidence is insufficient to make a firm determination of eligibility or benefit level, or cannot be obtained, a collateral contact may be required. Generally, the agency shall rely on the household to provide the name of any collateral contact. The household may ask for help in designating a collateral contact.

When the collateral contact, designated by the household, cannot provide an accurate third party verification, the agency shall do one of the following:

1. designate another collateral contact
2. ask the household to designate another collateral contact
3. provide an alternative form of verification

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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NOTE: The agency is responsible for obtaining verification from acceptable contacts. A collateral contact is an oral confirmation of a household's circumstances by a person outside the household. The contact may be made by the agency either in person or by telephone. Written statements by collateral contacts shall not be required as a condition of eligibility. Some examples of acceptable collateral contacts include employers, landlords, social service agencies, and neighbors who can be expected to provide accurate third-party verification.

Before making any collateral contact, the household must be informed of the proposed contact, what information is required, and why the contact is needed.

Households shall be provided a clear notice of their right to withdraw their application if they do not want the agency to pursue a collateral contact designated by the agency.

DOCUMENTATION: All case files must be documented to support decisions of eligibility and/or benefit levels, the reasons for questioning non-mandatory items, the need to make collateral contacts, and the reasons for not accepting a client designated collateral contact.

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Verification and Documentation

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RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVIDING VERIFICATION - The household has the primary responsibility for providing verification to support statements made on the application. The Eligibility Specialist shall assist the household in obtaining this verification. The household shall not be required to present verification in person at the Human Services office. The Eligibility Specialist shall accept any reasonable proof provided by the household and shall be primarily concerned with how adequately the verification proves the statement on the application form. When all other sources of income verification are unavailable, the amount to be used shall be based upon the best available information.

VERIFICATION AT OTHER TIMES - The same verification procedures that are used for initial application will be used in all subsequent eligibility and benefit level decisions.

REFUSAL OR FAILURE TO PROVIDE VERIFICATION

1. If the household refuses or fails to provide verification, deny the application, unless there is good cause.
2. If the household is receiving benefits and refuses or fails to provide verification, close the case, unless there is good cause.

NOTE: For a determination of refusal to be made, the household must be able to cooperate, but clearly demonstrate that it will not take actions that it can take and that are required to complete the certification process. For example, to be denied for refusal to cooperate, a household must refuse to be interviewed, not merely fail to show up. If there is any question as to whether the household has merely failed to cooperate the household shall not be denied or closed.

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Verification and Documentation

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3. The household shall not be determined ineligible when a person outside the household fails to cooperate with a request for verification. Individuals considered disqualified (see list at FS-444-4) shall not be considered as a person outside the household.
4. If a household refuses to cooperate with a Quality Control reviewer, the household shall be denied or terminated for refusal to cooperate. The household shall not be determined eligible until it cooperates in the Quality Control review or unless it reapplies after the time limits described below. This applies to all households, including those eligible for expedited service.

If a household which has been terminated for refusal to cooperate with a State Quality Control reviewer reapplies after 95 days beyond the annual review period for that Quality Control sample month, it may be found eligible but each eligibility factor must be verified, regardless of whether or not the information is questionable.

If such a household reapplies after 95 days from the end of the annual review period, and the household is eligible for expedited service, the household shall be provided benefits based on the expedited service processing requirements, including the provision that only identity must be verified. However, before the household may receive an issuance not processed under expedited service requirements, the household must provide verification of all eligibility requirements.

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**APPLICATION PROCESS**

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Verification and Documentation

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Verification of all eligibility requirements refers to any household circumstance that could affect eligibility. Required verification is not limited to those items required at the time of initial application or at recertification. Items such as household composition, citizenship or eligibility for the standard utility allowance that would normally only be verified if questionable, must be verified in these cases.

If a household which has been terminated for refusal to cooperate with a Federal Quality Control reviewer reapplies after 7 months beyond the annual review period for that Quality Control sample month, it may be found eligible but each eligibility factor must be verified.

NOTE: The annual review period refers to the federal Quality Control review period and runs from October 1 through September 30.

5. In cases where verification is incomplete, the household must be provided with a written statement of required verification and an offer to assist in obtaining it. The household shall be allowed sufficient time to provide the missing verification.
6. When information from another source contradicts statements made by the household, a reasonable opportunity shall be given the household to resolve the discrepancy.
7. When the household fails to provide verification required to establish a deductible expense or income exclusion, determine eligibility without the deduction or exclusion. Do not deny or terminate benefits for failure to provide such verification.

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TANF or PaS Reference

CFR 273.2 (g)

Section: **FS-222-6**

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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Time Standards/Procedures

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Different  
Chap. I, Sec. B,

**GENERAL RULE**

OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE - Eligible households that complete the initial application process shall be given an opportunity to participate as soon as possible but no later than 30 calendar days following the date the application was filed. The application date is the day that an application, containing the applicant's name and address and the signature of a responsible household member or its authorized representative, is received in any Maine food stamp office.

An opportunity to participate is assured by authorizing the allotment not later than the 27th day following the date the application was filed. Authorization any later than the 27th day will not provide the household an opportunity to participate within the 30 day standard.

**DENYING THE APPLICATION**

Households that are determined to be ineligible shall be sent a notice of denial as soon as possible but not later than 30 days following the date the application was filed. If the household has failed to appear for two scheduled interviews and has made no effort to pursue the application, a notice of denial shall be sent on the 30th day following the date of application.

In cases where the interview was conducted and all necessary verification was requested on the same day the application was filed, a notice of denial shall be sent no sooner than the 10th day or later than the 30th day if the household was provided assistance as outlined in Section 222-5, but it failed to provide the requested verification.

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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Delays in Processing

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If the agency does not determine eligibility and provide an opportunity to participate within 30 days following the application filed, the cause of the delay shall be determined using the following criteria:

1. A *delay* shall be *considered the fault of the household* if it has failed to complete the application process and the agency has taken all of the required action to assist the household. The following actions must have been taken by the agency before a delay can be considered the fault of the household.
  - a. For failure to complete the application the agency must have offered or attempted to offer assistance in its completion.
  - b. For failure to comply with work registration requirements, the agency must have informed the household of the need to register and the household must have been given at least 10 days from the date of such notification to register these members.
  - c. Where verification is incomplete the agency must have offered assistance as outlined in section FS 222-5 and the household must have been allowed sufficient time to provide the missing information (at least 10 days from the date of the initial request for the particular verification).
  - d. For failure to appear for an interview, the agency must have attempted to reschedule the initial interview within 30 days following the application date.



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TANF or PaS Reference

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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**DELAYS IN PROCESSING**

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**NOTE** - If the household failed to appear for the first interview and a subsequent interview is postponed at the household's request or cannot otherwise be rescheduled until after the 20th day but before 30th day, the household must appear for the interview, bring verification, and register members for work/training by the 30th day, otherwise, the delay shall be the fault of the household. If the household has failed to appear for the first interview and a subsequent interview is postponed at the household's request until after the 30th day the delay shall be the fault of the household. If the household has missed both scheduled interviews and request another interview any delay shall be the fault of the household.

2. Delays that are the fault of the agency include, but are not limited to, those cases where the agency failed to take the actions described in Number 1 above.

**ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN ON PROCESSING DELAYS** - If, by the 30th day further action cannot be taken on the application due to the fault of the household, entitlement to benefits for the month of application shall be lost. The household shall be sent a notice of denial which advises the household that if the required action is taken within 60 days following the application date a new application is not necessary. If the household is found eligible, benefits will be authorized from the date the household takes the required action.

Whenever a delay in the initial 30 day period is the fault of the agency, action shall be taken immediately to correct the situation. The household shall be notified by the 30th day that its application is being held pending. The household shall also be notified of any action it must take to complete the application process. If the household is found to be eligible during the second 30 day period, it shall be entitled to benefits retroactive to the month of application.

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TANF or PaS Reference

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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**DELAYS IN PROCESSING**

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DELAYS BEYOND 60 DAYS - If the agency is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30 day period, and the case file is otherwise complete, the agency shall continue to process the original application until an eligibility determination is reached. If the household is determined eligible, and the agency was at fault for the delay in the first 30 days, benefits shall be authorized retroactively to the month of application. If, however, the initial delay was the household's fault, benefits shall be authorized retroactively only to the month following the month of application. The original application may be used to determine the household's eligibility in the months following the 60 day period.

If the agency is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30 day period but the case file is not complete enough to make an eligibility determination, the agency shall continue to process the original application.

If the household is at fault for not completing the application process by the end of the second 30 days, the application shall be denied and the household will be required to file a new application if it wishes to participate. The household shall not be entitled to any lost benefits even if the delay in the initial 30 day period was the fault of the agency.

EXCEPTION: Expedited services (FS 222-2).

Different  
Chap. I, Sec. B.

DELAYS CAUSED BY THE AGENCY - When a delay is the fault of the agency

do not deny.  
take prompt action to process the application.

If the household is found eligible beyond thirty days of the application date, provide retroactive benefits to the date of application.

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AFDC Reference

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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**DELAYS IN PROCESSING**

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DELAYS CAUSED BY THE HOUSEHOLD - If a household is at fault for not completing the application process within the initial thirty-day period, deny the application.

If the household takes the required action within sixty days of the date of application, do not require a new application. If eligible, authorize benefits for the entire month after the month of application.

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TANF or PaS Reference

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Section: **FS-222-7**

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**APPLICATION PROCESSING**

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**Approval/Denial Procedures**

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After processing an application

1. send Notice of Decision.
2. if eligible, authorize benefit.

Same  
Chap. I, Sec. B.

The benefit is prorated from the date of application. The certification period will be specified by the Eligibility Specialist, based upon anticipated household circumstances.

If ineligible, send notice explaining reasons for denial.

**NOTE:** Applications for redetermination are covered in FS 666-10.